How to cope with community and school violence

Violence is always upsetting. But when it takes place in your community or at a nearby school, it can leave you questioning your safety or the safety of those you love most. And it can trigger some strong feelings.

How do you know if your response is normal and healthy? And how do you know if you should seek support?

Everyone is different

We're all unique. So even if two people go through the same event, they'll often have distinct reactions. What kinds of things can impact your response?

- **Past trauma.** If you've experienced violence in your past, it can bring up those feelings again.
- **Mental health.** People with anxiety or depression may have a harder time "bouncing back" from a violent event.
- **Resources.** If you have friends, family and other supports, it can make it easier to cope.

Also, the closer you are to the violence, the more it may affect you. So if you witnessed the event, you'll probably have a more intense response than if you learned about it from the news.

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What to expect

Whether or not you were directly impacted by violence, you can still be affected. You may feel shock over reports of an act of violence in a place that's familiar to you.

Knowing what to expect may help give you a little peace of mind. People often feel:

- Numbness
- Grief
- Disbelief
- Anger
- Ways to cope
- Frustration
- "On guard"
- Fear
- Powerlessness

Ways to cope

No matter how you're affected, there are things you can do to help yourself. Here are some tips:

- **Know the facts.** It's important to know the facts and not respond to rumors. Rumors can create more uncertainty and fear.
- **Minimize media.** Reading or watching the news all the time can leave you feeling worse. Get the facts and then check the news from time to time.
- **Make a plan with loved ones.** Talk to friends and family about what you'll do if there's an emergency. Decide how you'll contact one another and where you'll meet if you're separated. A plan can help you feel more in control.
- **Distract yourself.** Do things that give you a sense of control. This can include work, exercise or time with family and friends.
- **Practice healthy habits.** Stress can affect your health. So take care of your body. Avoid too much caffeine or alcohol. Exercise and get enough quality sleep.

When to get help

Sometimes our reactions to violence can overwhelm our normal coping skills. Watch for the following symptoms:

- Problems getting through day-to-day life
- Not getting enough sleep for two weeks or more
- Not being able to focus or enjoy normal activities
- Change in appetite
- Feeling irritable or more or less reactive than usual
- An increase in worry or feelings of panic

If you're having one or more of these symptoms, consider talking to a mental health professional to get help with coping.

It's natural to have a reaction to violence — whether or not you're directly involved. We're here to help. Call us for free and confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

1-833-327-2386
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